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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000132

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2020
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS ALLEGE NEW ABUSES TIED TO
POLITICAL CRISIS

REF: 2/9 E-MAIL FROM AMB. LLORENS TO A/S CROWLEY

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (B and D)

11. (C) Summary. Manuel de Jesus Murillo and Ricardo Antonio Rodriguez, cameramen for "Globo TV," which followed an anti-coup political line, were kidnapped on February 1, interrogated about the anti-coup resistance movement, and released later the same day by four unknown armed persons. Human Rights Prosecutor Sandra Ponce told the Ambassador she is investigating and believes the allegation is credible that Murillo and Rodriguez were kidnapped by security forces. The Ambassador stressed to both Ponce and, in a separate conversation, to Minister of Security Oscar Alvarez USG concern, calling for a thorough investigation. In an unrelated case, police confirmed that Vanessa Zepeda, a nurse at the Social Security Institute and member of its union (SINTRAIHSS) who had been active in the anti-coup movement, was abducted and found dead in an empty lot on February 4 in Tegucigalpa. There is no known evidence at this time to suggest there is a direct link between Zepeda's political activity and death. Ponce said the investigation suggests that Zepeda's murder was a common crime and was not politically motivated. End Summary.

Kidnapping of Two Cameramen

12. (SBU) Manuel de Jesus Murillo and Ricardo Antonio Rodriguez, cameramen for "Globo TV," which followed an anti-coup political line, were kidnapped on February 1 by four unknown armed persons and released later the same day. Murillo and Rodriguez alleged to human rights NGO CODEH that the kidnappers were police officers. They alleged that during the encounter they were questioned about the anti-coup resistance movement's funding and weapons. Poloff expressed concern about the case on February 5 and 8 to Special Prosecutor for Human Rights Sandra Ponce. Ponce said that her office took the testimony of the two cameramen, coordinated with the Minister of Security Oscar Alvarez to provide them security, and that the Public Ministry was actively investigating the allegation of police involvement. Ponce said there was no sign that Murillo and Rodriguez had been physically hurt during the kidnapping, although they both alleged to human rights groups that they were mistreated and in one case allegedly placed inside a body bag and made to believe they would suffocate.

13. (C) The Ambassador called Minister of Security Alvarez on February 9 to express USG concern about this case and encouraged a thorough investigation into alleged wrongdoing. The Ambassador stressed to Alvarez that human rights was of great importance to the U.S. and that the government of President Porfirio Lobo needed to take these issues extremely seriously. The Ambassador told Alvarez that the restoration of the constitutional and democratic order required a commitment to uphold the rule of law and defend human rights.

Alvarez told the Ambassador that he was aware of the case of the two journalists who had alleged that they had been kidnapped and tortured. He said he was investigating the possible role of two police officers suspected of being involved in the incident. He promised to keep us informed. He was not aware of the case of the murder of Vanessa Zepeda but said he would get himself up to speed on the case and get back to us. Alvarez admitted he was known for his strong law and order credentials, but noted that he did not want to be tagged as someone who was not sensitive to the rule of law and human rights and said he would work these issues closely with us.

14. (C) The Ambassador also spoke to Human Rights Prosecutor Sandra Ponce on February 9 to express concern about the kidnapping of Murillo and Rodriguez. Ponce said that she believed the allegations of police involvement are credible given that one of the cameramen, Manuel de Jesus Murillo, was in the Embassy of Brazil with former President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya and had been detained previously by police. Ponce assured the Ambassador that the Public Ministry was actively investigating the allegations.

Death of Vanessa Zepeda

15. (SBU) CIPRODEH human rights group told Poloff that Vanessa Zepeda, a nurse at the Social Security Institute and member of its union (SINTRAIHSS) who had been active in the anti-coup movement, was abducted and found dead in an empty lot on February 4 in Tegucigalpa. Police told an embassy employee on February 5 that Zepeda's mother is a police officer (DNIC) and that the police believe evidence shows that Zepeda was with her boyfriend at the time of her death. The police stated that the investigation revealed Vanessa had sexual relations the day she died, but there were no signs of violence to the body which led them to believe she died of natural causes (Note: this contradicts reports by human rights organizations that Zepeda died from a gunshot wound. End note.) An autopsy is pending.

16. (SBU) Human Rights NGO CODEH reported on February 5 that Zepeda's parents alleged her death was connected to her involvement in the anti-coup political movement. (Note: no specific evidence has been reported as of February 9 that would suggest there is a direct link between Zepeda's death and her anti-coup political activism. End note.)

17. (C) During his February 9 conversation with Minister of Security Oscar Alvarez, the Ambassador also expressed USG concern about this case and encouraged the police carry out a thorough investigation into alleged wrongdoing. Additionally, an Embassy employee again expressed concern on February 9 to police regarding the death of Zepeda and allegations that it is tied to her anti-coup political activities. The Ambassador raised this case with Special Prosecutor for Human Rights Sandra Ponce on February 9, who said the investigation is being handled by the Special Prosecutor for Women at the Public Ministry and their office reported that as of February 9 there are no indications or evidence in the case to suggest the death was politically motivated. Ponce told Poloff later on February 9 that as police reported, the Public Ministry understands there were no signs of violence to Zepeda's body.

Comment

18. (C) Human rights groups in Honduras allege that violations

of human rights connected to the political crisis continue and some allege the situation is worse than it was two months ago. It appears that elements of the anti-coup movement continue to be targeted for intimidation and violence, however there is no evidence as of February 9 to suggest that the situation is worse compared to that which existed under the de facto regime. The government of President Lobo appears to be committed to investigating allegations of wrongdoing by security forces. We will continue to press them to do so.

LLORENS